

USDA Foods

Overview

The Food Distribution Division of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service's (FNS) dual mission is to strengthen the Nation's nutrition safety net by providing food and nutrition assistance to school children and families and supporting American agriculture by distributing high quality, 100% American-grown USDA Foods. To achieve this mission, the FNS Food Distribution Program coordinates the distribution of USDA Foods to many of the public and private schools and institutions that provide meals to students.

Terminology

Bonus USDA Foods – The food products that USDA purchases in addition to the entitlement food value. When School Food Authorities (SFAs) order bonus USDA Foods, their entitlement is not reduced.

Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) – A branch under USDA that administers the food and nutrition assistance programs, providing regulations and guidance materials.

National School Lunch Program (NSLP) – The largest student nutrition program in the United States and the first such mandated by Congress.

School Breakfast Program (SBP) – Federal school meal program that provides funding based on the household income of the students.

USDA Foods - Food products purchased by USDA and distributed to the NSLP to help reduce food costs for food service operations, as well as remove surplus domestic food from the marketplace.

What are USDA Foods?

The Food Distribution Division of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) coordinates the distribution of USDA Foods to states in support of approximately 100,000 public and private nonprofit schools that provide meals to students. The entitlement amount varies from year to year based on an annual adjustment which reflects changes in the Price Index of Foods used in schools and institutions and the number of lunches served by each SFA. While the USDA's Food Distribution Programs are coordinated by the USDA/FNS Food Distribution Division, they are administered at the State level by State Distributing Agencies.

Schools participating in the National School Lunch Program will receive USDA Foods, called "entitlement" foods, at a specific value which is set annually, for each lunch served. Schools can also get Bonus USDA Foods as they are available through USDA's price support and surplus removal programs. While there is no entitlement for USDA Foods in the School Breakfast Program; NSLP USDA Foods may be served in the SBP.

A wide variety of USDA Foods are available from a list of more than 200 various products. Available food items may include fruits, vegetables, meats, fish, cheese, dry and canned beans, fruit juices, vegetable oil, peanut products, rice, pasta products, flour, and other grain products.

Considering USDA Foods at their purchased value rather than as “freebies” is important to the attitude toward the use of USDA Foods. The fact that a food is donated does not justify giving very large portions or serving the food simply to use it up. If USDA Foods can take the place of a purchased item, it adds real value to the school meal program. The food service operations that fully utilize USDA Foods may have an advantage financially.

Why are USDA Foods Important?

The USDA's Schools/Child Nutrition USDA Food Programs support domestic nutrition programs and American agricultural producers through purchases of domestic agricultural products for use in schools and institutions. USDA-purchased food is available to enhance child nutrition program's nutritional and financial value.

Resources

Additional resources may be available for this topic. Please check the Idaho School Nutrition Reference Guide website for copies of manuals, user guides, and helpful links to relevant subject matters.